

A-LEAGUE WOMEN REPORT

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FOREWORD FROM THE CO-CEOS

Matildas-mania is alive and well, and why wouldn't it be after the transformational moment that our amazing Matildas have provided through the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.

This is a moment that parallels England's Lionesses' 2022 European Championship win on home soil. After that success, 75% of the Euros broadcast audience went on to watch the 2022-23 Women's Super League (WSL) season. Alongside this, the average WSL attendance nearly tripled from 1,923 in 2021-22 to 5,616 in 2022-23.

The Euros effect saw Arsenal Women alone enjoy an average attendance of 16,976 in the 2022-23 season, higher than any A-League Men side. That's not to mention the 60k+ crowds WSL teams attracted for FA Cup and Champions League fixtures.

Recognising this similarity, we should ask ourselves: how do we make sure that we seize our opportunity? How do we build on capturing the biggest TV audience in 20 years, selling out stadia, and unearthing a new generation of football fans, to make sure that the A-League Women (ALW) doesn't get left behind?

The 2022-23 season represented the second season of the 2021-2026 A-Leagues Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). There were positive signs that the five-year CBA is facilitating higher quality ALW careers, most notably illustrated by:

- record high total payments to players;
- a breakthrough with regards to contract stability;
- a record 261 players appeared on a team sheet throughout the season;
- stronger competitive balance; and
- the continuing critical role that the A-League Women plays in developing our national team players.

On the pitch, the season itself delivered, with the addition of four extra regular season fixtures during the 2022-23 campaign, meaning that 12 additional points were available this season.

Sydney FC pipped Western United in their inaugural season by a point, meaning that their grasp remained on the Premiers' Plate for a second consecutive year. The two would also end up meeting in the Grand Final with Sydney FC again taking the spoils from Western United to emerge as Champions, the fourth time they have lifted the trophy in the club's history.

The central theme highlighted in the Report this season was that ALW players are feeling the strain of increasing football demands in a context where their careers are not yet full-time professional.

During the 2022-23 season, three in five ALW players worked outside football, with half of those players who worked putting in more than 20 hours at their other job/s in the average week. This means many players

are caught in a stressful tug-of-war between growing football commitments (which they embrace) and other work, which remains necessary until the competition can provide a full-time, year-round employment framework.

The PFA and APL review the CBA each season to ensure it remains fit for purpose. In doing so, it is pleasing that we have been able to agree several enhancements for the upcoming 2023-24 season, including:

- increases to the minimum wage, salary floor and cap;
- introduction of a Women's World Cup Legacy Player;
- increase to the number of foreign players;
- establishment of a minimum salary for scholarship players; and
- introduction of a youth development player.

Delivering full-time professionalism is what's required to ensure that we seize our opportunity. The players recognise that they need to continue to play their part in delivering a quality football product while acknowledging that those charged with regulating and administering the game need to see this as an opportunity, not a cost.

Government, alongside the clubs, sponsors and corporate partners, must provide investment to deliver



on this objective, as a thriving A-League Women competition is inextricably linked to the Matildas' international success. If the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup has shown us anything, it's that only football has the power to captivate, unite and inspire the nation and, in doing so, bring out the best in all of us.

In closing, we would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of our ALW members. We would also like to recognise and thank those players who have recently hung up their boots: Teigen Allen, Kim Carroll, Ellie Brush, Jessie Rasschaert, Tara Andrews, Claire Coelho, Hannah Brewer, and Georgina Worth, all players who have been strong advocates for advancing the ALW competition.

We hope you enjoy the Report.

Kate Gill and Beau Busch

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2022-23 PFA A-League Women Report details the continued growth of the competition in the year preceding the transformative 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup on Australian and New Zealand soil.

This season featured the most teams, longest season, highest player payments, and largest Grand Final attendance in the league's 14-year history.

The competition now has the chance to build on unprecedented interest in women's football. The data and player feedback in this document can guide policymakers to identify areas of improvement and opportunity for this next chapter.

It should be recognised, however, that the competition was already on a healthy trajectory, underpinned by the 2021-2026 A-Leagues Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

The second year of that agreement saw the competition grow to 11 clubs, with the introduction of Western United. Each club played 18 regular matches, up from 14. Player contracts ran 29 weeks, up from 23. The minimum salary rose to \$20,608 from \$16,344, and total player payments reached \$5.40m, up from \$3.98m the previous season.

The Employment Framework section of the Report details how all of the above metrics will increase again for 2023-24 and beyond. Among other mutually agreed

enhancements to the CBA, we will see the salary floor and cap grow faster than originally agreed.

As a result of player feedback, another welcome adjustment for next season will be the elimination of daytime kick-offs during the summer months, with the impact of daytime kick-offs on the players illustrated in the Report.

The increased length and breadth of the competition meant a record 261 players appeared on a team sheet throughout the season. Each team used more players on average than the previous season, and 86 appeared in the league for the first time.

At the same time, the CBA enabled more stable contracting practices, with 22% of players on multiyear deals, up from 2%.

The influx of additional players did not dilute the quality of the competition, with competitive balance improving on the previous season, whilst the age profile of the league remained stable.

A-League Women clubs provided 17 players for Women's World Cup squads. This included just two Matildas, down from seven in 2019, but nearly half (11) of New Zealand's Football Ferns were based here.

In its 2022-23 format, the A-League Women provided fewer match minutes than the domestic leagues of

most Women's World Cup nations. It will close the gap to several leagues next season with the reintroduction of Central Coast Mariners and the extension to 22 rounds (plus finals).

Domestic clubs will receive Club Solidarity Funding from FIFA for preparing players for the World Cup. Depending on tournament progress, each player will generate between US\$12,500 and US\$23,500. That amount will be split between the clubs registering the player during the tournament and the player's clubs between the ages of 12 to 22.

Despite the competition's progress, it does not yet deliver full-time, 12-month contracts. Most players (60%) still work outside football. The PFA's player survey identified the challenge for players in balancing increasingly demanding football commitments with still-necessary supplementary employment.

The remaining three years of the CBA are set to feature 35-week contracts. The minimum wage will jump to \$25,000 for 2023-24 and rise to \$26,500 by 2025-26. The ball continues to move forward, but evidently, players can neither rely solely on football to support themselves financially nor treat football as the part-time endeavour it once was.

Through the survey, players have said that balancing work and football has negative impacts on their football performance, mental health, and ability to

sustain their careers. Achieving full-time contracts would have benefits for players' experiences as well as the league as an entertainment product, enabling it to seize the post-World Cup moment and go to the next level.

The survey also revealed that A-League clubs have room for improvement with regard to integrating their women's teams into the club alongside the men's teams. Only 31% of players across the league felt the two teams were well integrated at their clubs, and 72% agreed there was unequal treatment on the basis of gender at their clubs. These findings highlight the need for cultural as well as regulatory change.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

On the heels of a ground-breaking Women's World Cup, women's football in Australia faces a period of unprecedented opportunity. There is a healthy and robust discourse emerging about where and how best to direct resources to seize this moment.

The research in this Report provides an evidence-based platform from which to identify key opportunities for improvement.

On this basis, the PFA makes four key recommendations to ensure the continued growth and success of the competition, its clubs, and its players, and the broader game.



1

We can't wait to provide full-time professionalism:

Clubs' demands on players are increasing as the competition improves in terms of standards, professionalism, and exposure. While players welcome (and are pushing) this progress, there is a feeling among many of being caught in an unsustainable tension between their football commitments and other pursuits they cannot yet afford to leave behind.

This dynamic harms the wellbeing of the players, and also takes away from the quality of the football product and the competition's ability to produce the next generation of Matildas heroes.

Full-time professionalism should be framed as an investment, not a cost. In England, the WSL tripled its revenues in the three years after going full-time pro in 2018-19, while simultaneously providing the platform for a Euros-winning and World Cup runners up squad.

The PFA recognises that delivering on this objective requires support from a range of commercial, government, and football stakeholders. This is why the players have worked collaboratively with the APL in seeking greater government and commercial support and will continue to do so.



2

Non-compliance is not an option:

The end of season ALW player survey revealed that a number of clubs are failing to comply with key areas of the CBA, such as providing players with an advance schedule to enable them to plan their lives around football.

The CBA prescribes mutual minimum obligations between players and clubs; both have a responsibility to ensure that they fulfil their obligations, many of which don't come with associated financial costs. These obligations have been agreed and put in place to ensure that the players have a safe workplace with requisite high-performance standards, allowing clubs to retain and attract talent.

It is unacceptable for either party to fall short of their side of the bargain.



3

Getting venues, scheduling, and fan engagement right:

The strategic choice of A-League Women venues matters if we are to capture fan interest and enhance the quality of the product.

This season, 25 different venues hosted ALW matches. Western United played at four 'home' venues, while Perth Glory was the only club to use just one.

The scheduling of daytime matches in the summer months of 2022-23 had a negative impact on the wellbeing of players, the experience for supporters, and the standard of play.

The vast majority of ALW players want more matches to be played in larger stadia: 81% want to see more double-headers, compared to just 6% who want more standalone matches. Scheduling should anticipate extreme heat, not react to it.

If fans are to be provided with a superior match experience, and players are to contribute to it by performing on the pitch, then transient clubs, daytime summer kick-offs, and substandard pitches must be left in the past.



4

It's not just A-League Men:

Other than Canberra United, every ALW team is part of a club that also fields an A-League Men team.

Gender equality is embedded into the CBA, however throughout the season, the PFA received feedback that suggested that some of the women's teams were not well integrated into their clubs, or always treated with respect.

Getting the culture and integration piece right is a competitive point of difference that doesn't have to come at a financial cost. Clubs must ensure the 'integration' metrics revealed in this Report improve by this time next year.

PFA ACTIONS

The recommendations are critical to advancing the ALW's collective interests. To date the PFA has taken the following actions to address players' concerns and ensure that the recommendations have the best possible chance of realisation.



Delivering an enhanced player payments and contracting model:

The changes made through the annual CBA review will increase player pay and are designed to advance contractual stability and certainty for players.



Specific summertime scheduling:

The impact of early afternoon kick-offs on player health and safety and match quality is evident throughout the Report. Following the PFA's request the APL has dramatically reduced early afternoon kick-offs in the summer months. The PFA will continue to work proactively with the APL and clubs to ensure adequate heat mitigation strategies are also implemented.



CBA compliance:

All findings of the annual PFA survey have been shared with the APL Board, APL Senior Management and all clubs. In addition, APL has reminded all clubs of their obligations. The PFA and APL will also stand up the following consultation committees:

- Professional Women's Football Committee;
- Player Health and Safety Committee; and
- Player Development Committee.

Whilst the findings remain confidential, the PFA reserves the right to revisit this if progress is not made.



Develop and implement the PFA Safe Football Project:

In partnership with global experts, the PFA has developed the PFA Safe Football Project which aims to tackle abuse, bullying and harassment in Australian football. The Project aims to build a strong focus on education, deterrence and effective routes to reporting.



A stronger working relationship with referees:

To date the PFA and referees have had an ad hoc engagement. For the 2023-24 Season the players plan to establish a regular working relationship to deliver improved cooperation.

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SURVEY METHODOLOGY



Where you see this symbol, the Report shares findings from the PFA's player surveys. This includes the 2022-23 A-League Women end of season player survey and small post-match surveys conducted throughout the season. 172 players responded to the end of season survey, including at least 11 from each club, so the sample is representative and provides for robust comparison between subgroups. Responses were collected on a voluntary basis between the 3rd and 24th of April 2023 via an online survey. Not every player responded to every question.

The results are sometimes contrasted against the A-League Men survey, which received 174 responses this season, or against previous iterations of the survey.

The fact that the vast majority of the playing groups from both A-Leagues complete the survey speaks to the players' high level of engagement in their industry and provides a powerful source of information for policy-makers.



WOMEN'S WORLD CUP



- ▶ A-League Representation
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A-LEAGUE REPRESENTATION

Seventeen A-League Women players represented their countries at the 2023 Women's World Cup, including 11 from New Zealand, three from the Philippines, two Matildas, and one from China. A further four Filipinas hailed from New South Wales state league clubs, including Central Coast Mariners' Academy.

This does not include players who played in the 2022-23 A-League Women season but joined a different league before the World Cup started, usually because they returned to their parent club after an ALW loan. Examples are Australia's Alex Chidiac (loaned to Melbourne Victory from Racing Louisville) and Katrina Gorry (loaned to Brisbane Roar from Vitvtsjö GIK), Denmark's Rikke Madsen (loaned to Victory from North Carolina Courage), and China's Xiao Yuyi (loaned to Adelaide United from Shanghai Shenli).

Seven of Australia's squad for the 2019 World Cup were based in the A-League Women at the time, so whether or not Gorry and Chidiac are counted this time, there has been a decrease in domestic Matildas. The other big change from Australia's perspective is that in 2019, the majority of Matildas were playing at US clubs, whereas most now play in Europe.

The specific location of players at the time of the tournament matters because clubs registering World Cup players receive funding from FIFA, as outlined below.

Australian-based World Cup Players

League	Club	Player	National Team
A-League Women	Brisbane Roar	Indiah-Paige Riley	New Zealand
	Canberra United	Wu Chengsu	China
	Canberra United	Grace Jale	New Zealand
	Melbourne City	Hannah Wilkinson	New Zealand
	Melbourne City	Katie Bowen	New Zealand
	Melbourne Victory	Claudia Bunge	New Zealand
	Perth Glory	Elizabeth Anton	New Zealand
	Sydney FC	Cortnee Vine	Australia
	Wellington Phoenix	Betsy Hassett	New Zealand
	Wellington Phoenix	Michaela Foster	New Zealand
	Wellington Phoenix	Milly Clegg	New Zealand
	Wellington Phoenix	Paige Satchell	New Zealand
	Western Sydney Wanderers	Clare Hunt	Australia
	Western Sydney Wanderers	Malia Steinmetz	New Zealand
	Western Sydney Wanderers	Sarina Bolden	Philippines
Western United	Angela Beard	Philippines	
Western United	Jaclyn Sawicki	Philippines	
Other	Blacktown City	Malea Cesar	Philippines
	Blacktown Spartans	Carleigh Frilles	Philippines
	Central Coast Mariners Academy	Kiara Fontanilla	Philippines
	Mt Druitt Rangers	Anicka Castaneda	Philippines



FIFA CLUB SOLIDARITY FUND

FIFA's Women's World Cup Club Solidarity Fund (sometimes called the Club Benefits Programme, like the men's version) compensates clubs that have helped prepare the players to perform at the tournament.

Half of the Fund goes to clubs where players were based between the ages of 12-22, whether those clubs were grassroots, amateur, or professional. The other half goes to the clubs where the players are registered at the time of the World Cup.

FIFA specifies that the funds should be reinvested in women's or girl's football. It was established for the first time in 2019, with a total pool of US\$8.48m. For 2023, this total will rise to US\$11.3m: a 33% increase. It is similar to the Club Benefits Programme for the Men's World Cup, first established in 2010, but the men's funds instead go to the club/s where the players were based in the two years preceding the tournament (rather than partly to the 'formative' clubs).

The payments attached to each player are based on how many days the player is at the tournament, counted from the start of the official preparation period until the day after they are eliminated. For this analysis, we assume the 2023 preparation period starts on July 10.

The 2019 Women's World Cup total was split over 18,722 'player days', whereas the expanded 32-team tournament in 2023 will feature about 20,000 'player days' across all teams. So, the actual funding per player per day has increased from about US\$453 to about US\$565.

In 2019, Australian clubs took in US\$269k, a not insignificant figure in the domestic women's football

economy.¹ This was based on a Round of 16 result for the Matildas, though non-Australian players also contributed to Australian clubs. Around half (US\$137k) went to A-League Women clubs, leaving half for lower tier clubs or federation-run talent programs.

The 59 Australian clubs to receive a payment was the equal highest number in the world, although several nations, including the USA, China, Japan, and several in Europe, received a greater collective sum. Brisbane Roar's US\$35k was the most a single Australian club received.

FIFA is promising to equalise World Cup Prize Money for the men's 2026 and women's 2027 tournaments. Club Benefits are often rolled up in the Prize Money discussion, along with team preparation funds (sometimes, a cynic might say, in an attempt to overrepresent the Prize Money figure). It is not clear whether FIFA would also equalise or drastically increase Club Benefits, but for reference, FIFA distributed US\$209m to men's clubs in 2018 and 2022, increasing to US\$355m for the 48-team 2026 and 2030 Men's World Cups.²

Australian clubs collected US\$2.1m for men's players at the 2022 World Cup.

An increase to Women's Club Benefits of 10-20x would be an absolute game-changer for women's club football, massively incentivising clubs the world over to develop and attract the best players, simultaneously rewarding success while unlocking new investment which had to be targeted to real outcomes.

The PFA has been touting the prospects of this type of global stimulus package for clubs and national associations since its 2019 Our Goal is Now campaign

for gender equal World Cup Prize Money.

This section of this Report, then, is an analysis of what A-League Women clubs might expect to receive this year, but also an effort to raise awareness of the huge opportunity that lies ahead – and an invitation to Australian football stakeholders to join the lobbying effort.

FIFA disbursements for Men's and Women's World Cups

	2023 Women's World Cup	2022 Men's World Cup	2026 Men's World Cup
Prize Money	\$110m	\$440m	\$541m*
Club Benefits / Club Solidarity Fund	\$11.3m	\$209m	\$355m

Figures in USD

*Calculated as FIFA's budgeted \$896m for Prize Money and Club Benefits Programme³, less the \$355m it has since agreed for CBP

- <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/6dced953776724e3/original/ixbzeckzjfosu9n1zeh-pdf.pdf>
- <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/74f3450c94873e02/original/FIFA-World-Cup-Qatar-2022-Club-Benefits-Programme-Report.pdf>
- <https://publications.fifa.com/en/annual-report-2022/finances/2023-2026-cycle-budget-and-2024-detailed-budget/>

2023 DISTRIBUTIONS

The Solidarity Funds attached to each player will range from about US\$12,500 for a Group Stage exit to US\$23,500 for a World Cup finalist. Matildas Clare Hunt and Cortnee Vine generated an estimated US\$23,000 each for reaching the second last day of play.

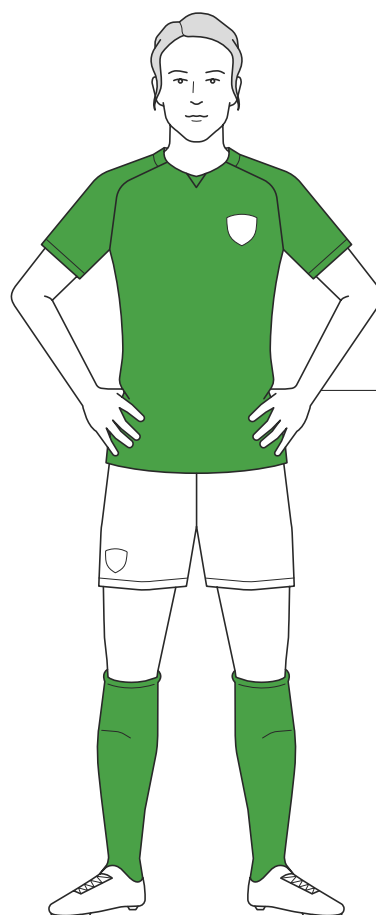
ALW clubs will attract two streams of payments: one for being the current registering club of a World Cup player, and one for registering a player during ages 12-22 (regardless of where that player is currently based). For currently registering 17 World Cup players, ALW clubs will collectively pull in around US\$120k. Wellington Phoenix houses four Football Ferns, so it should receive at least US\$25,000 from that stream. Western Sydney Wanderers will receive a similar amount for its three players.

FIFA does not differentiate players by any metric other than how many days they remain at the tournament. Clubs in the second tier of NSW women's football will get a baseline of around US\$6,250 for each of their Filipina World Cup players.

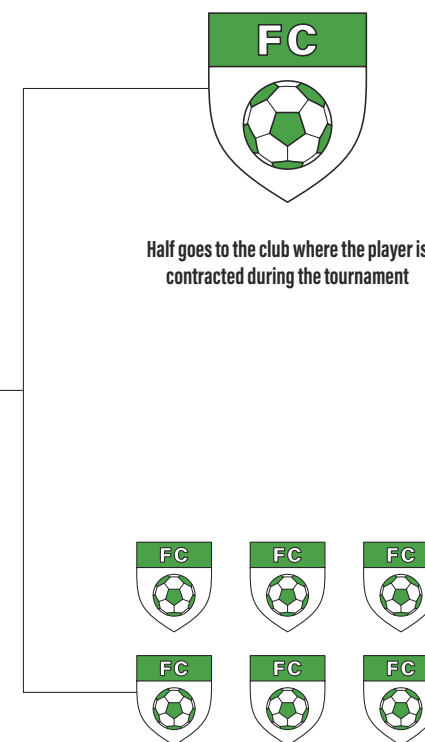
The other half of the funding stream will see clubs around the world attract around US\$500 to US\$1000 for each year they homed a World Cup player between the ages of 12 and 22. The figure can be more per training year if the player is not yet 22.

It is beyond the scope of this report to estimate this stream for ALW clubs. But it is almost certain that after adding funds for formative years, ALW clubs will collectively receive a higher take than in 2019 (US\$137k). This is largely because of New Zealand players; none of New Zealand's 2019 squad were based in the ALW at the time of the tournament.

2023 FIFA Women's World Cup Club Solidarity Fund



Approximately US\$12,500 to US\$23,500 per player, depending on progress in tournament



Half goes to the club where the player is contracted during the tournament



Half is split equally between the player's clubs from ages 12-22

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This section highlights the scale of FIFA's funding relative to the domestic women's football economy. Pushing FIFA to rapidly increase this investment, using the men's game as a benchmark and FIFA's clear capacity to pay among key arguments, should be a priority for all stakeholders.

Regardless of whether the Fund is increased, ALW clubs (and those further down the pyramid) can do more to recognise and seize the opportunity to maximise Australia's share of the stimulus. Clubs should consider the two halves of the Fund and adopt strategies for each.

Firstly, the formative-years component. What's interesting about the Club Solidarity Fund for women, as opposed to the Club Benefits Programme for men, is that a developing club will continue to receive funding for each future Women's World Cup where a player appears, so long as the policy continues in its current structure.

Matildas Clare Polkinghorne and Lydia Williams appeared at their fifth World Cups in 2023, so if the Club Solidarity Fund had always existed, their formative-year clubs would be dipping in for their fifth set of quadrennial payments, which seem likely to scale up with each tournament.

They are exceptional cases, but they illustrate how this structure of disbursements places large, broadly underappreciated value on the practice of contracting young players who might one day feature in Women's World Cup squads.

There are no guarantees in football, but players most likely to become future internationals, such as, say, youth national team players, could be seen as having

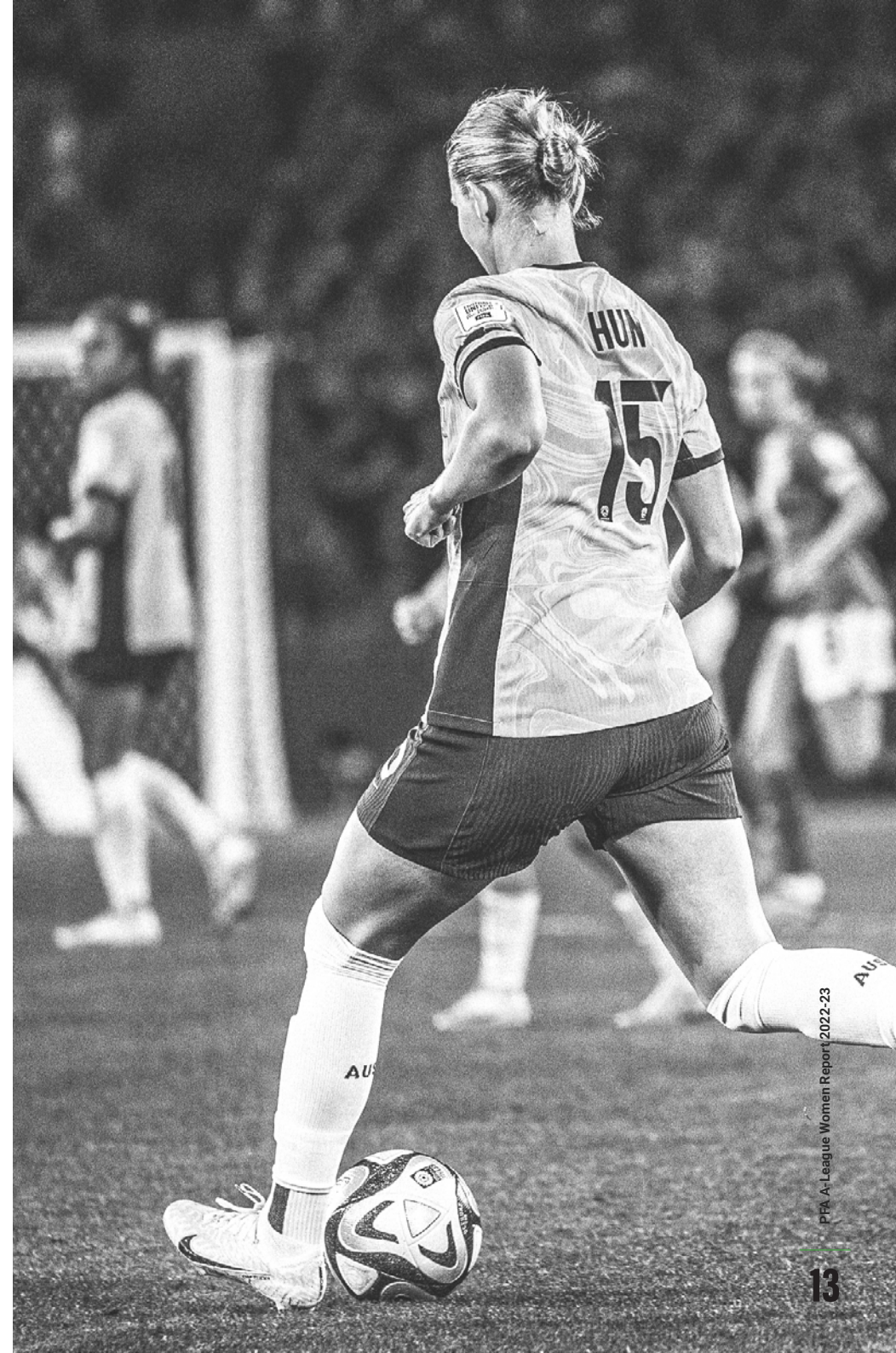
the potential to provide long-term income streams to the clubs who contract them before they turn 22.

Shrewd ALW clubs may realise that those income streams are on course to more than return the modest investment required to attract, retain, and maximise the development of such players.

Regarding the other half of the payments, for current clubs of World Cup players, these payments are significant in the ALW economic context.

Other sections of this Report will highlight the importance of the ALW providing 12-month contracts sooner rather than later. 2026-27 provides an obvious deadline for this achievement, given that it will ensure our clubs do not see top players leave the competition on the eve of the 2027 Women's World Cup and lose out on what may be, by then, a very lucrative windfall.

Club strategy should not be limited to Australian players. The expansion of the Women's World Cup to 32 teams ensures that nations with currently underdeveloped women's leagues will qualify. As one of the leading women's leagues, the ALW will be rewarded for continuing to attract and develop World Cup-bound talent from a multitude of nations. As a result of the foreign player quota for the league increasing to five from next season, the ability to do so has been enhanced.



PLAYER PREPARATION

FIFPRO's Women's World Cup Workload Journey Report compared the number of matches played by each team in the top domestic leagues of nations that qualified for the 2023 World Cup.⁴

It found that the A-League Women sits towards the bottom of the pack in terms of match minutes available.

ALW 2022-23 featured 18 regular matches plus up to three finals (there were 20 rounds, but teams had two byes each). Only four of the 27 leagues analysed had fewer guaranteed matches. Competitor leagues in Asia, such as Japan (20), Korea Republic (21), and China (22), were slightly ahead, while the 12 European leagues provided between 20 and 30 regular rounds.

The world's premier league, England's WSL, had 22 rounds, but this was complemented by Cup competitions. Last season, Sam Kerr's Chelsea Women played five FA Cup matches, three League Cup matches, and ten Champions League matches, for a total of 40 fixtures. Kerr played just over 3,000 club minutes, 50% more than a player who played every ALW minute, including finals, could achieve.

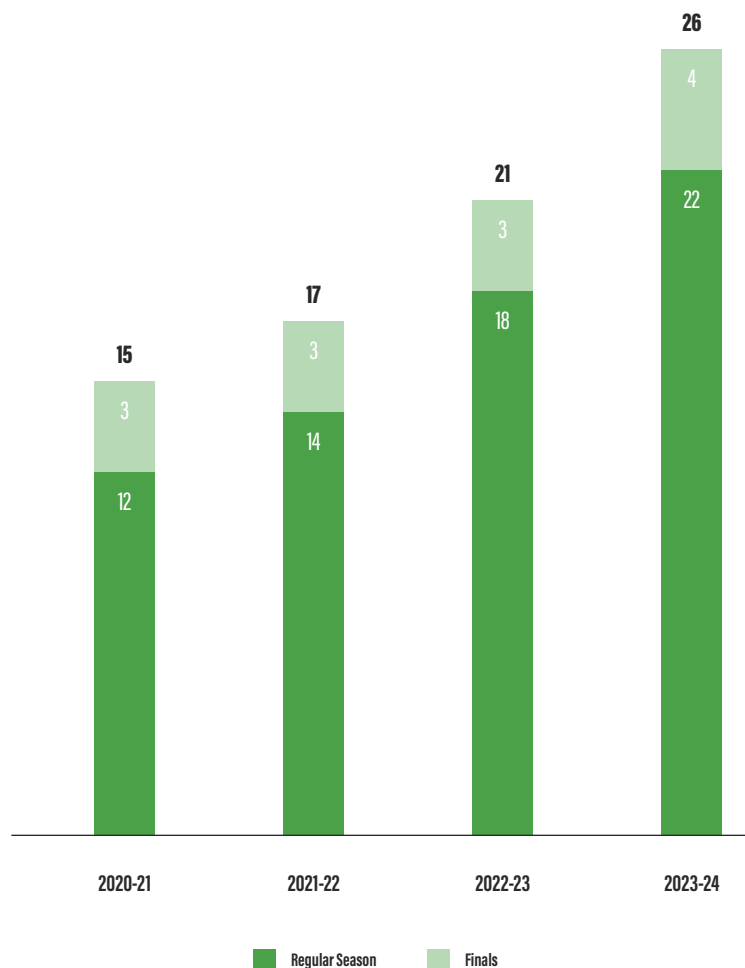
A related consideration regarding the ALW's preparation of Women's World Cup players was the timing. The A-League Women Grand Final was on April 30th, nearly three months before the start of the World Cup.

Spain's 30-round Liga F finished on May 21st, the WSL finished on May 28th, and the UEFA Champions League Final was on June 3rd, so players based at top European clubs had a less disjointed run-in to the tournament.

It is clear that for the ALW to be a league of choice for Australian and foreign players, the season must be longer. This progress is in train: with the introduction of Central Coast Mariners, the 2023-24 ALW will feature 22 rounds plus four weeks of finals.

Whilst FA has publicly stated its intent to introduce an Australia Cup for women, this requires careful consideration, with an increase in match minutes just one component of ensuring attractive terms and conditions for players.

Number of Matches Per ALW Team



4. https://fifpro.org/media/xcweuugu/pwm_fwwc_report_2023_twopage.pdf

EMPLOYMENT FRAMEWORK

- ▶ CBA Overview
- ▶ Player Payments
- ▶ Contracting Practices
- ▶ Player Profiles
- ▶ Player Survey



CBA OVERVIEW

The 2022-23 season represented the second season of the 2021-2026 A-Leagues Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

There are positive signs that the five-year CBA is facilitating higher-quality A-League Women careers, with more stable contracting and record player payments.

In some cases, the improving conditions are a direct result of the CBA, which features built-in increases to the minimum wage, salary cap, and salary floor each year.

It also follows that if clubs have more certainty about the employment framework in which they are operating, the scope for more strategic and long-term decision-making and investment is enhanced.

On the negative side, the end of season ALW player survey revealed that a number of clubs are failing to comply with key areas of the CBA, such as providing players with an advance schedule to enable them to plan their lives around football. The CBA prescribes mutual minimum obligations between players and clubs; it is unacceptable for either party to fall short of their side of the bargain.



CBA adjustments for 2023-24: Balancing stability and growth

The challenge of long-term collective bargaining for women's football is that the industry is on an unpredictable growth trajectory, particularly with a Women's World Cup in Australia in the middle of the deal.

England's Women's Super League (WSL) is emblematic of the potential for massive growth. Analysis of the league's finances estimates that revenues have risen from £8.5m (\$16.3m) in 2017-18 to £30.7 (\$58.9m) in 2021-22.⁵

Since then, the Lionesses won the 2022 Women's Euros on home soil, and average WSL attendances have nearly tripled from 1,923 in 2021-22 to 5,616 in 2022-23. Arsenal Women enjoyed an average attendance of 16,976 this season, higher than any A-League Men side. That's not to mention the 60k+ crowds WSL teams attracted for FA Cup and Champions League fixtures.

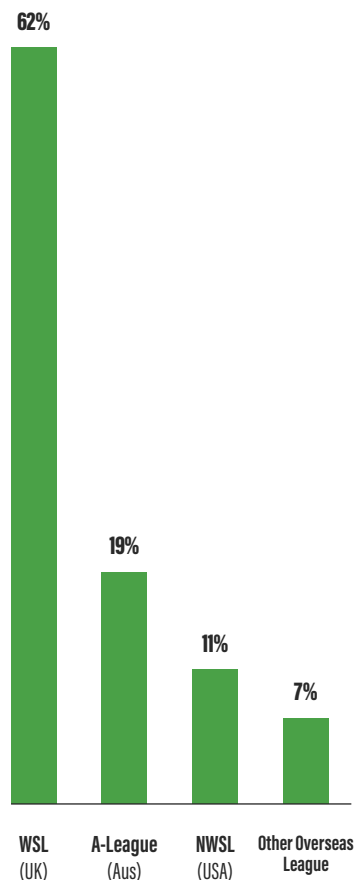
Since the 2018-19 PFA player survey, the WSL has gone from the third-ranked league of choice for ALW players, behind the US National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) and the ALW itself, to the clear preferred destination, ahead of the ALW and the NWSL in third. The recent government review of the WSL has called for comprehensive reforms to enhance pay conditions in the league and across the pyramid in England, which is only likely to accelerate the league's growth.⁶

5. <https://swisramble.substack.com/p/the-growth-of-the-womens-super-league>

6. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2023/jul/13/review-women-football-overhaul-future>



Which of these leagues would you most prefer to play in?
(% who ranked 1st)



This example illustrates the speed of change possible in women's football with a combination of aggressive investment and the bonus of hosting a major international tournament.

The A-Leagues CBA must provide the certainty that allows clubs to plan long-term, whilst being flexible enough to adapt to a changing landscape. The deal addresses this latter point in two ways.

Firstly, the CBA includes triggers where certain financial achievements will provide clubs with greater capacity to invest in their squads in the final two years.

Secondly, the PFA and the APL agree to meet at the conclusion of each season to have a good faith discussion about how the league's regulations could be improved to reflect the reality of the league's progress, and the clubs' and players' experiences, as well as the progress of competitor leagues and sports.

After these discussions and the agreement of players, several CBA adjustments will come into effect for 2023-24. These are outlined in the table below.

CBA Adjustments for the 2023-24 Season

Area	Change
Salary Floor / Cap	Increase from \$485k / \$550k to \$500k / \$600k
Women's World Cup Legacy Player	For 2023-24 and 2024-25, each club can contract up to two (one domestic, one foreign) WWC Legacy Players outside salary cap and player roster
Foreign Players	Increase from four to five per club
Scholarship Players	Minimum salary of \$12,400 (replacing previous hourly rate). Payments to now sit outside salary cap
Wellington Phoenix Player Roster	Australians to be counted as domestic players
Youth Development Players	Replaces Train-on Player category. Registered with the club, player expenses to be reimbursed.

PLAYER PAYMENTS

Total payments to players reached a record high this season. The 11 clubs collectively paid players \$5.4m, up from last season's previous high of \$3.98m across ten clubs. This season's average per club was \$491k, up from \$398k in 2021-22.

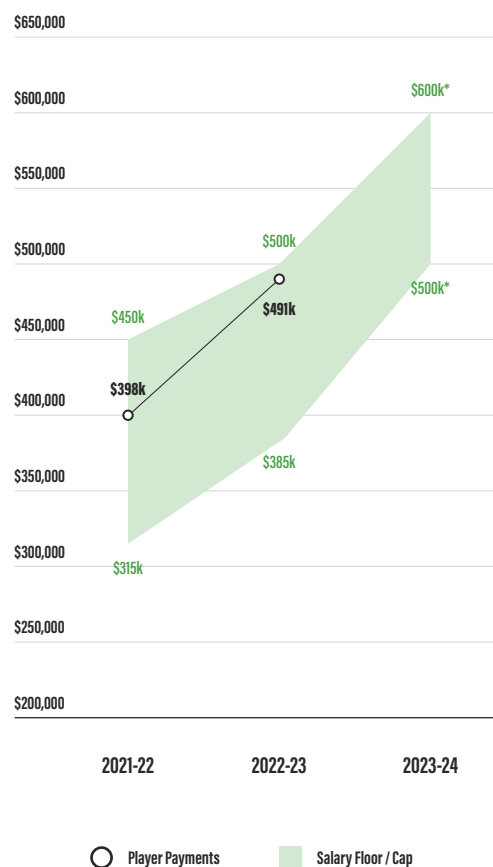
The CBA drove this increase. This season, the salary floor / cap was \$385k / \$500k, up from \$315k / \$450k in year one of the CBA. The minimum wage for a Contracted Player was \$20,608 this season, up from \$16,344.

For 2023-24, the salary floor / cap will be \$500k / \$600k (which is an increase on what was originally agreed – see previous section). Scholarship Players will be moved outside the salary cap, and a new Women's World Cup Legacy Player will be introduced, also sitting outside the cap.

Another ALW team, Central Coast Mariners, will join the competition, so next season should see new record investments at both a per club and total level, with the increasing demand for talent also playing an important role.

For individual players, the minimum salary for a Contracted Player will be \$25,000, reflecting a 35-week contract (up from 29 weeks in 2022-23). The minimum salary for a Scholarship Player will be \$12,400.

Total Player Payments (Per Club)



Minimum Salary



*Newly agreed adjustment to CBA. 2024-25 and 2025-26 seasons TBC.

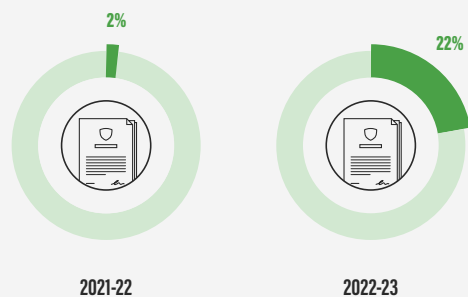
CONTRACTING PRACTICES

This season represented a breakthrough with regards to contract stability. Historically, the ALW has been mostly defined by one-year deals, with a few exceptions. Finally, clubs are now beginning to offer multiyear deals to a substantial share of players.

In recent seasons, around 90% of players made their contracts available to the PFA for data and analysis. In 2021-22, 98% of ALW contracts inspected were one-year deals. This season, this share fell to 78%, with most of the remainder on two-year deals. A handful of players were on three-year or longer contracts.

The share of players who were in their first year at their club this season did not change (60% cf. 61% in 2021-22). This shows that clubs are not necessarily taking a different approach to squad management, but simply that more players can count on the stability and certainty of a multiyear deal rather than being re-signed on a rolling basis.

Percentage of Players on Multiyear Deals



PLAYER PROFILES

With the introduction of Western United taking the competition to 11 teams, the ALW saw a record 261 players appear on a team sheet throughout the season.

On average, this was 23.7 players per team, up from 21.6 in 2021-22. So, in addition to expansion, the lengthening of the season from 14 to 18 games per team (plus finals) also correlated with a greater number of players getting an opportunity. A total of 247 players made an appearance.

This growth in the player cohort meant clubs had to find new talent to fill their rosters. Consequently, some metrics portrayed a high level of player churn, even though the previous section showed that contractual stability has improved.

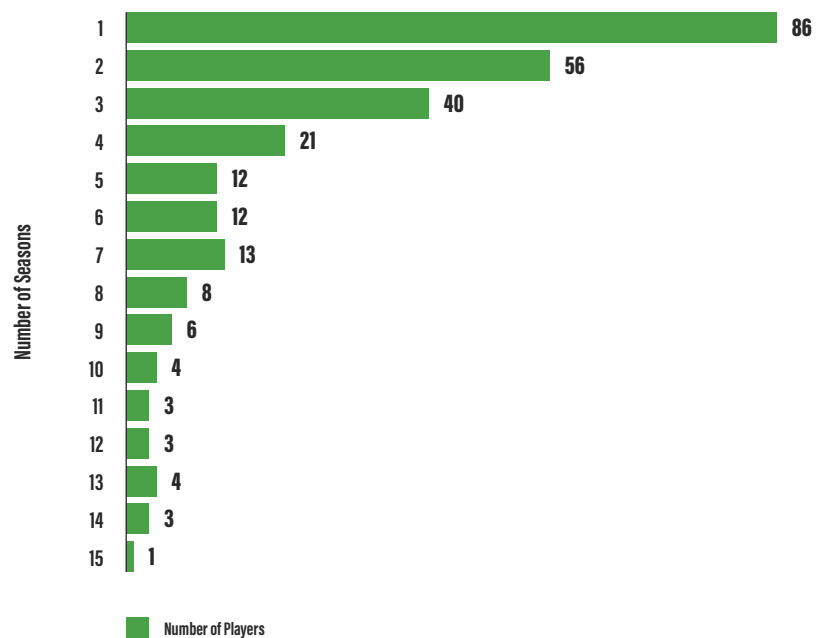
For example, this season, 86 players were in the ALW for the first time. The average number of seasons that an ALW player has been in the competition decreased this season to 3.5 from 3.8 last season and 4.3 the year before.

But as we saw above, these fresh faces did not necessarily displace established players, but rather added to them.

One source of new players was overseas: the number of foreign players increased to 50 this season from 31. This number should increase again next season after it was agreed to amend the CBA so that each club is able to contract up to five foreign players instead of four.

Interestingly, the demand for new players did not result in clubs turning to youth any more than in previous seasons. The age profile of players who made an appearance and the share of match minutes going to different age groups remained steady.

Total Number of Seasons in the ALW



Average Number of Seasons in the ALW



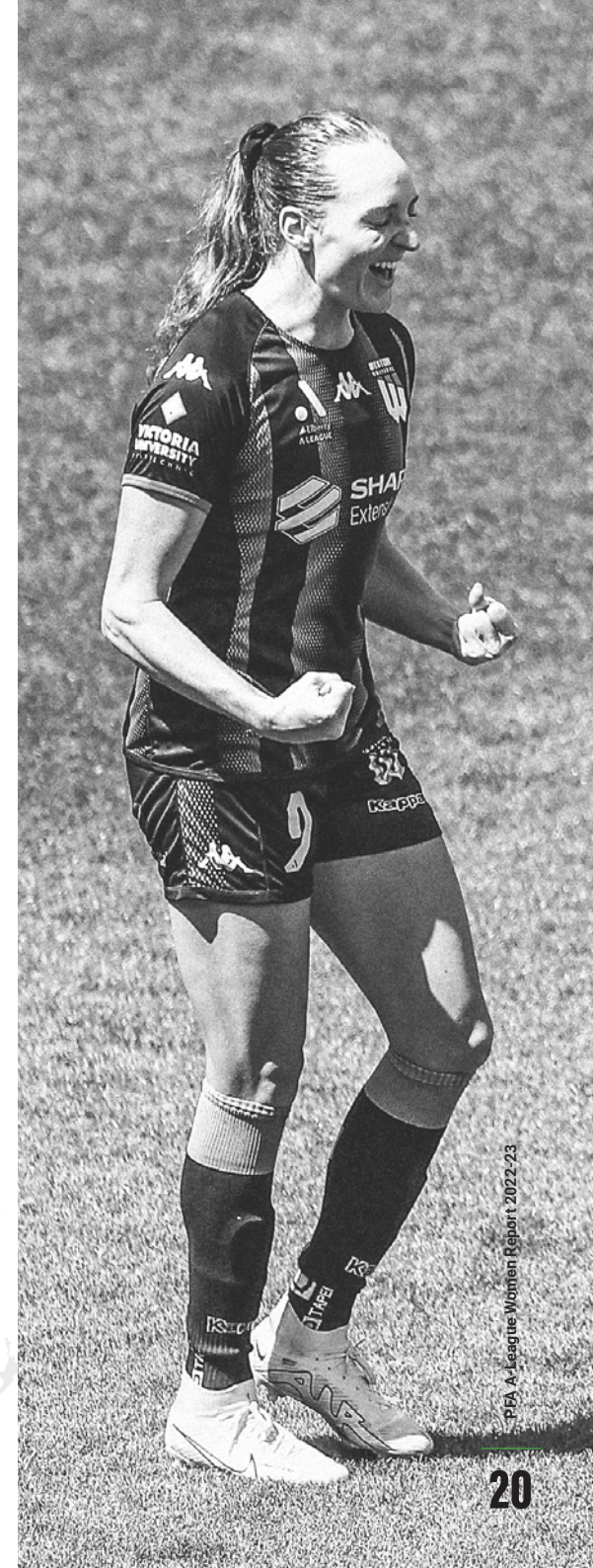
FOREIGN PLAYERS



50
Players



18
Nationalities



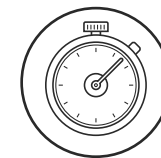
MATCH MINUTES



247
players made an appearance

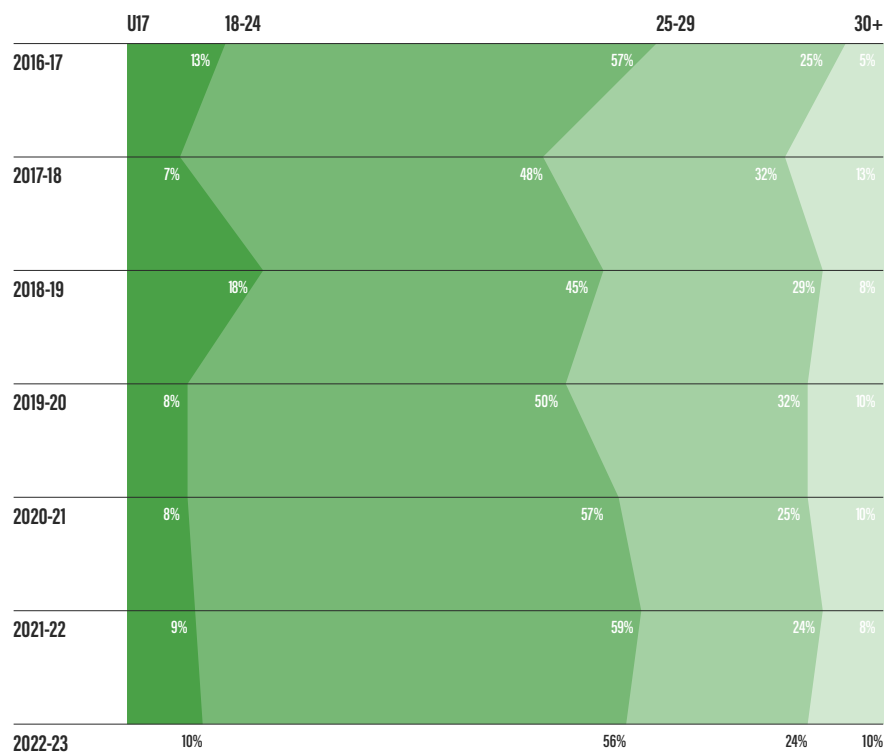


2,866
total appearances

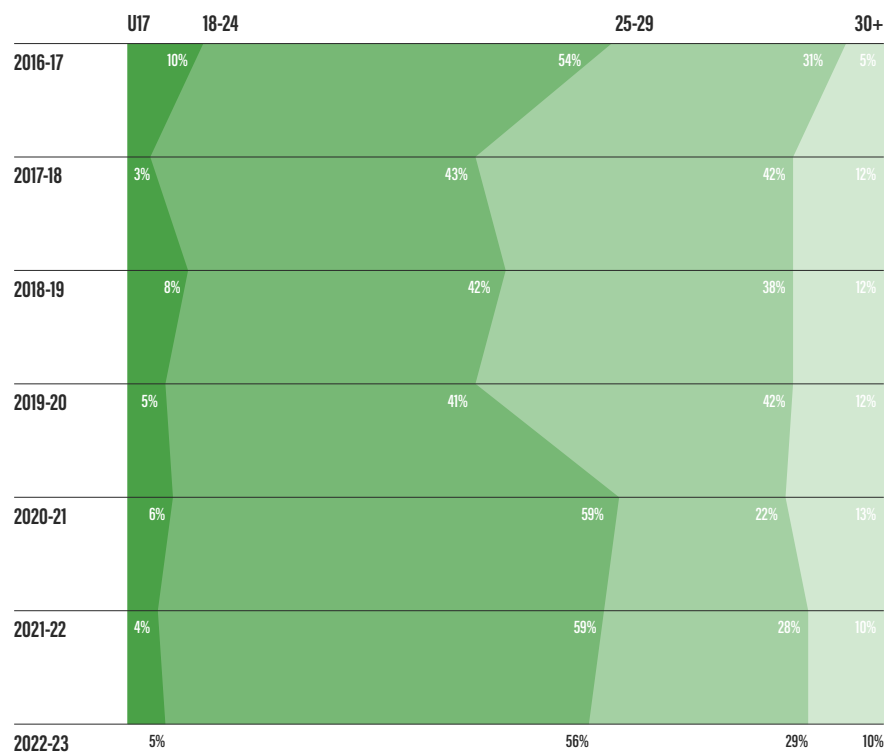


195,668
total minutes played

Players who made an appearance
(by age)



Share of minutes played
(by age)



Top minutes played by players (regular season only)

Player	Club	Age	Matches	Minutes
Annalee Grove	Adelaide United	21	18	1,620
Beattie Goad	Melbourne Victory	25	18	1,620
Danika Matos	Western Sydney Wanderers	22	18	1,620
Elizabeth Anton	Perth Glory	23	18	1,620
Kayla Morrison	Melbourne Victory	26	18	1,620
Maruschka Waldus	Adelaide United	30	18	1,620
Sydney Cummings	Western United	23	18	1,620
Katie Bowen	Melbourne City	28	18	1,619
Natasha Rigby	Perth Glory	29	18	1,619
Hillary Beall	Western United	23	18	1,612

Squad stability

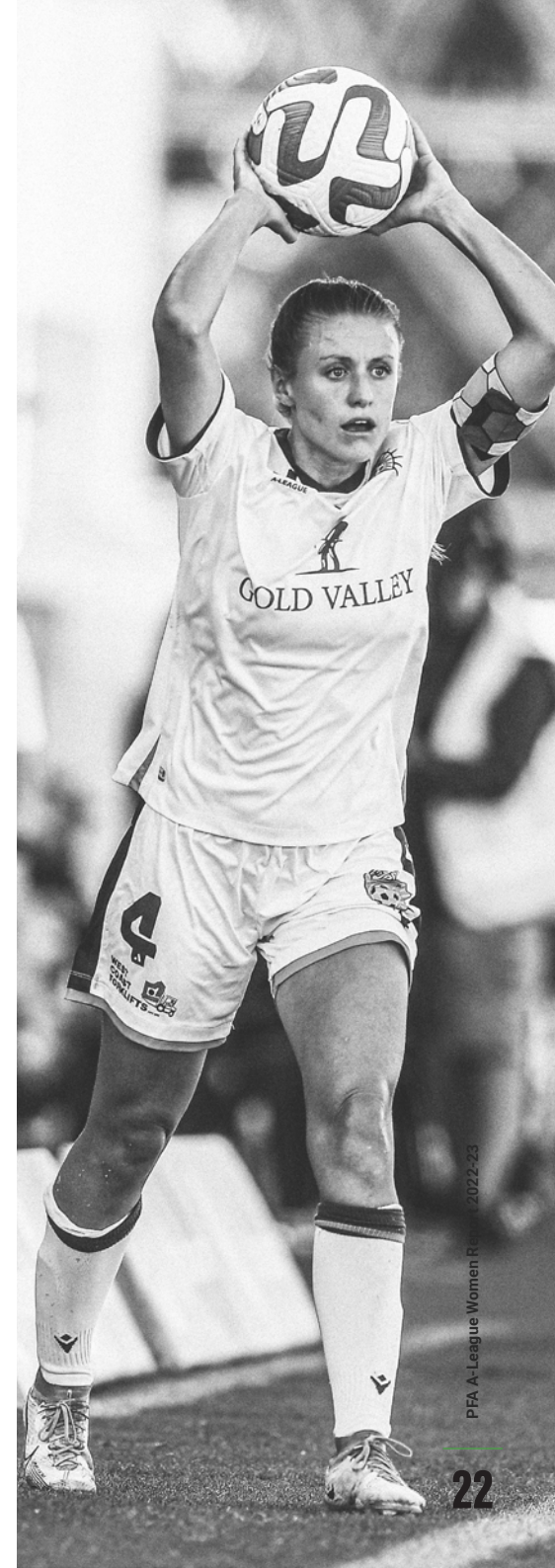
Club	Players Used	First Year at Club	Average Age
Adelaide United	22	10	22.5
Brisbane Roar	23	11	23.1
Canberra United	21	12	22.0
Melbourne City	22	7	22.3
Melbourne Victory	24	11	24.5
Newcastle United	23	14	23.5
Perth Glory	21	4	22.9
Sydney FC	25	9	22.0
Wellington Phoenix	22	9	22.4
Western Sydney Wanderers	23	15	24.6
Western United	22	22	20.9

The top-minutes table shows that the 2022-23 ALW season was short by leading standards.

FIFPRO's FIFA Women's World Cup Workload Journey Report showed that 18 of Spain's 23-player championship squad played at least 30 matches in the year before the tournament.⁷ For England, 19 of their squad cleared this mark, and for both nations, a further four players played between 20 and 30 matches.

Keira Walsh, of England and Barcelona, played 3,621 minutes for club and country in the year before the World Cup.

7. https://fifpro.org/media/xcweuuqu/pwm_fwmc_report_2023_twopage.pdf



PLAYER SURVEY

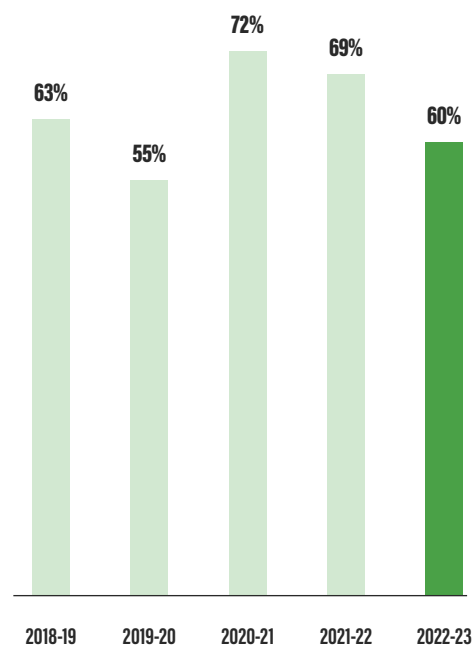
At a league level, the central theme to come through the ALW end-of-season survey this season was that players are feeling the strain of increasing football demands in a context where their careers are not yet full-time professional.

The PFA explored this in detail in a PFA Post called 'Getting over the hump: A-League Women's path to professionalism'.⁸

The survey revealed that 60% of ALW players were working a job outside of playing, which obviously remains a financial necessity when most players were sitting at or just above the minimum salary of \$20,608 for a 29-week contract.



Share of ALW players working outside of football



8. <https://pfa.net.au/the-pfa-post/pfa-post-getting-over-the-hump-a-league-womens-path-to-professionalism/>

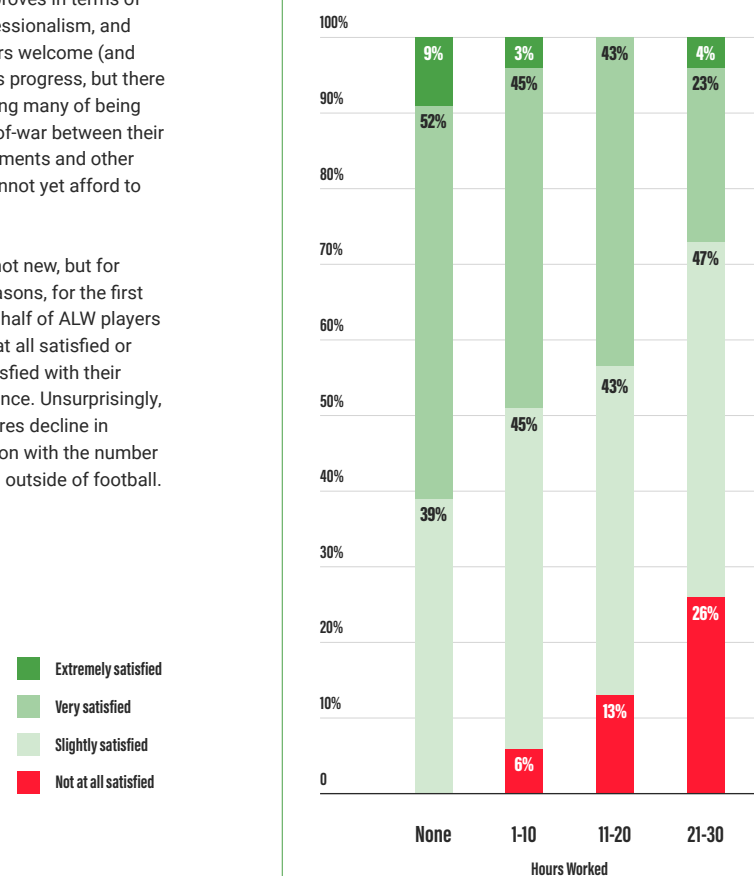
Of those who worked, nearly half (46%) worked more than 20 hours per week on average.

At the same time, clubs' demands on players are increasing as the competition improves in terms of standards, professionalism, and exposure. Players welcome (and are pushing) this progress, but there is a feeling among many of being caught in a tug-of-war between their football commitments and other pursuits they cannot yet afford to leave behind.

This conflict is not new, but for the past two seasons, for the first time, more than half of ALW players were either not at all satisfied or only slightly satisfied with their football-life balance. Unsurprisingly, satisfaction scores decline in perfect correlation with the number of hours worked outside of football.



How satisfied are you with your current balance between football/work/study/life (by average weekly hours worked outside of football)



Whilst the data outlines the problem, player feedback paints a vivid picture. Players wrote of a lack of sleep, mental health challenges, and compromised performance due to competing priorities.



What are some of the challenges of balancing football/work/study/life

“ *Only able to work night shifts due to morning trainings so it’s very hard to get adequate sleep after a night shift.* ”

“ *If my work and football commitments clash, I am expected by my coach to skip work (where I get paid more and am respected more), and I am expected by my boss to skip soccer, and neither care if you suffer financially or reputation wise for it.* ”

“ *It is difficult having to work an extra 40 hours a week just to get by, when many of my teammates don’t. This impacts my ability to perform, and takes away from what I am able to put into football, as well as takes away what I’m able to get out of it.* ”

“ *I just feel like there’s no time for anything else except football. Sometimes I feel tired and burnout enough playing the sport yet alone stressing out about outside commitments. Having to focus on life outside of football and money it has a real impact on mental health.* ”

The league’s economy is built on the quality of the football product and compelling stories. If players (and staff) are not able to commit themselves fully to their craft, its progress is stymied. Full-time professionalism should be framed as an investment, not a cost.

Other sports such as AFLW are having similar discussions in parallel. In a competitive talent market, football would do well to lead rather than lag.

The PFA understands that the APL and clubs accept this premise and share its ambition to get through this phase – over the hump – as quickly as possible.

In the immediate term, clubs can also do better to support players; the survey also revealed that most clubs are falling short of CBA requirements with regards to providing an advance training schedule and sufficient notice of changes to it.

Only 63% of players who were working over 20 hours per week agreed that at their club, “Players’ lives away from football are supported”.

While ALW players are still forced to juggle multiple work commitments, it is essential that the existing bargained conditions around schedules are adhered to and that club cultures respect this reality.

LEAGUE ASSESSMENT

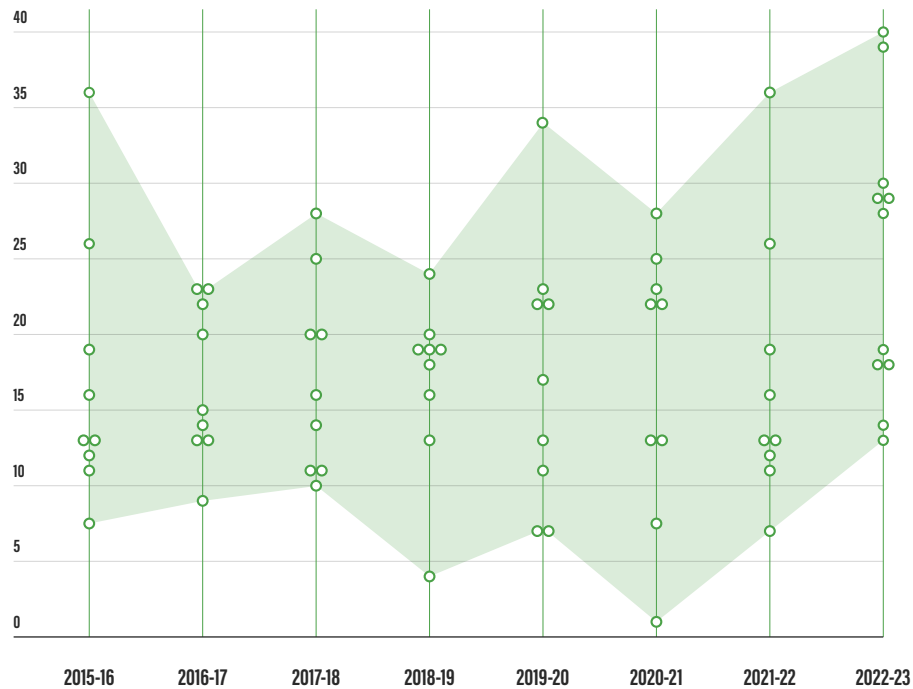
- ▶ Competitive Balance
- ▶ Heat & Scheduling
- ▶ Attendances
- ▶ Pitch Ratings
- ▶ Club Integration



COMPETITIVE BALANCE

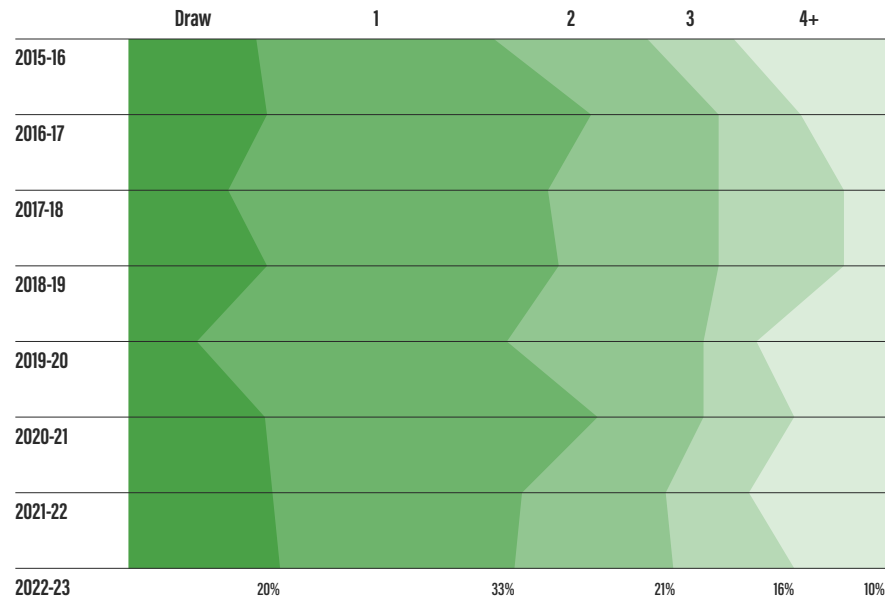
With the introduction of Western United, each team played four more fixtures this season, so it was natural that a new points record was achieved. But on a points per game basis, Sydney FC were less dominant this season (2.22) compared to last (2.57). Wellington finished last again but lifted their points per game to 0.72 from 0.5. There were close races for the Premiership and the top four.

Points Spread Comparison



There was a decline in the share of 'blowouts' this season, with only 10% of matches being decided by four goals or more, down from 18% in 2021-22. So, in addition to the ladder being tighter this season, matches were also generally closer. In a positive sign for the league's entertainment value, most matches (53%) were in play until the final whistle, with final scores either level or separated by a single goal.

Goal Margins



HEAT & SCHEDULING

CHALLENGES IN 2022-23

Scheduling was in the spotlight this season due to several matches being rescheduled at late notice because of extreme heat.

The PFA acknowledges that the APL has already confirmed the issue of mid-afternoon summer fixtures will be addressed for future seasons. Summer kick-offs will be no earlier than 6pm where lighting is sufficient, or 5pm in other cases.

This section is still included as a matter of reference.

In seven instances, a decision was taken to delay kick-off to a later time, in accordance with the Heat Policy agreed. The Heat Policy specifies the weather conditions under which a match should include drinks breaks or be delayed or postponed in the interests of player safety.

In five other instances, a decision was taken to delay kick-off to a later date, where the weather forecast made it look likely that the Heat Policy might apply.

The PFA surveys players after every match to assess aspects such as the conditions, the pitch, the atmosphere, and the officiating. There were 29 matches where a player indicated they felt the weather was “extreme”.

Among those, there were 18 with drinks breaks and eight where the player felt the match should have been postponed. In 20 of those 29 matches, the player felt that their performance suffered due to the conditions. On six occasions, a player said they experienced a “health problem”. Examples included heat exhaustion, shivers, heat rash, and vomiting.

In addition to compromised player safety and performance, there were negative impacts for supporters. It is not difficult to imagine fans being turned off by either the extreme heat itself, by the lessened standard of play, or by the uncertainty of the timing of kick-off, whether that’s on the day or while planning their weekend ahead of time (particularly for families).

This scenario is exacerbated when matches are played in the smaller venues, which have less shaded seating. For players, too, these venues offer less reprieve in the form of shadows cast across at least part of the pitch. At some grounds, benches are fully exposed to the direct sun.

JUST WARMING UP

Ominously, the Bureau of Meteorology’s 2022 Annual Climate Statement explained that the calendar year 2022 was actually one of the coolest years in Australia since the A-League Women began (as the W-League) in 2008-09.⁹ Both 2021 and 2022 were cooler than the previous trend due to being impacted by an extended La Niña event, which has now ended.

The latter part of the season hinted at a return to the new, worsening normal. For example, this year’s March was the tenth hottest on record in Australia, driven by heatwaves in its latter weeks which saw temperature records fall in the eastern states.¹⁰

Globally, July 2023 was by far the planet’s hottest month on record and probably in the last 120,000 years.¹¹

This evidence suggests that the impact of heat on matches is very likely to increase in occurrence and severity in future seasons, particularly in comparison to the past two seasons, highlighting the need for ongoing diligence and responsiveness to safeguard the health and safety of players.

9. <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/current/annual/aus/#tabs=Temperature>

10. http://www.bom.gov.au/clim_data/IDCKGC1AR0/202303.summary.shtml

11. <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/07/27/world/july-hottest-month-record-climate/index.html>



PLAYER VIEWS

The PFA ALW End of Season Survey found a near-consensus among the playing cohort regarding scheduling and heat. With regards to scheduling in general, 85% of players wanted later kick-off times, while 3% wanted earlier kick-offs.

When asked specifically about heat-impacted matches, 70% of players said the policy solution is not to schedule daytime matches for summer months at all, while 17% preferred the wait-and-see approach of this season, and 3% were happy to play through with drinks breaks.

ATTENDANCES

The A-League Women Grand Final attendance of 9,519 at CommBank Stadium was a record high for the competition.

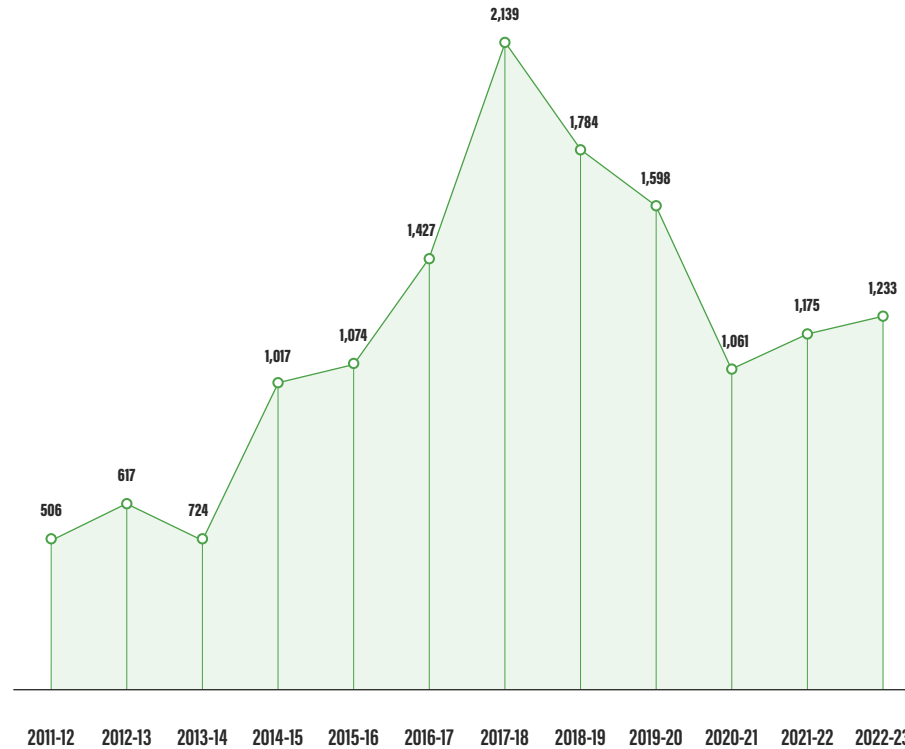
ALW attendance trends are difficult to compare like-for-like due to the fluctuating share of double-headers and standalone fixtures.

The choice of venue is more likely to impact the raw averages than interest in the club or competition.

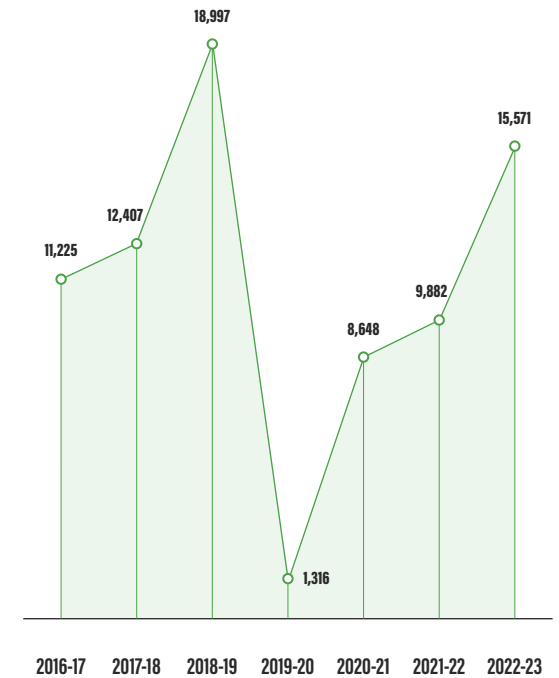
For example, Melbourne City's average crowd across four home games at AAMI Park was 2,936. Their average across five matches at Casey Fields, including a Melbourne Derby Elimination Final, was 502.

All that considered, the average for regular season fixtures this season of 1,233 was still well below the pre-COVID peak of 2,139.

Home and away attendances



Finals combined attendances



PITCH RATINGS

The PFA A-League Women Pitch Ratings are voted on by selected away team players after each match. Players rate the playing surface on four measures: pace, hardness, smoothness and overall quality. Pace and hardness are measured on a scale where the ideal score sits at the middle, while smoothness and overall quality are simply scored from one to five. The players also rate the atmosphere during the match.

In general, the pitch quality was highest at larger stadia where double-headers were played, while the best atmosphere ratings were found in smaller or mid-sized venues for standalone matches. This latter finding was not uniform: some of the worst atmosphere ratings also occurred at small venues.

This section also highlights the fragmented and transient nature of the ALW. This season, 23 different venues hosted ALW matches. Western United played at four 'home' venues, while Perth Glory was the only club to use just one.

The vast majority of ALW players want more matches to be played in the larger stadia: 81% want to see more double-headers, compared to just 6% who want more standalone matches. This may be due to a range of factors, but the quality of the pitches and facilities is believed to be the main driver.



Preferences for scheduling next season

More double-headers



More standalone matches



Stadium	Home Club	Overall Pitch Quality	Atmosphere
A.J. Kelly Park	Brisbane Roar	★★★★☆	3.3
AAMI Park	Melbourne City	★★★★☆	3.3
AAMI Park	Melbourne Victory	★★★★★	2.3
AAMI Park	Western United	★★★★☆	3.0
Allianz Stadium	Sydney FC	★★★★★	4.0
Caey Fields	Melbourne City	★★★★☆	1.8
CB Smith Reserve	Melbourne Victory	★★★★☆	2.7
City Vista Reserve	Western United	★★★☆☆	3.5
Coopers Stadium	Adelaide United	★★★★☆	3.0
Cromer Park	Sydney FC	★★★☆☆	3.0
Epping Reserve	Melbourne Victory	★★★★☆	2.5
Kingston Heath Soccer Complex	Melbourne City	★★★☆☆	1.0
Macedonia Park	Perth Glory	★★★★☆	3.4
Marconi Stadium	Western Sydney Wanderers	★★★★☆	4.5
McKellar Park	Canberra United	★★★★☆	3.6
Morshead Park Stadium	Western United	★★★★☆	3.0
Netstrata Jubilee Stadium	Sydney FC	★★★★☆	4.0
No.2 Sportsground	Newcastle Jets	★★★★☆	2.8
North Hobart Oval	Western United	★★★★☆	4.0
Perry Park	Brisbane Roar	★★★★☆	3.7
Scully Park	Newcastle Jets	★★★★★	2.5
Seiffert Oval	Canberra United	★★★★☆	4.0
Service FM Stadium	Adelaide United	★★★★☆	3.8
Sky Stadium	Wellington Phoenix	★★★★☆	3.6
Wanderers Football Park	Western Sydney Wanderers	★★★★☆	3.0

CLUB INTEGRATION

Other than Canberra United, every ALW team is part of a club that also fields an A-League Men team. Throughout the season, the PFA received feedback which suggested that some of the women's teams were not well integrated into their clubs, or always treated with respect.

For the first time, the end of season ALW player survey included a battery of questions designed to assess this aspect of the players' experience where relevant.

The players were asked to what extent they agreed with six statements.



To what extent do you agree with each statement, with regards to the integration of the women's team in the club and respect show to female players?

The women's and men's teams are well integrated at the club



The women's team is a valued part of the club



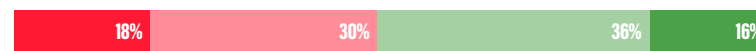
The women's team is a priority for club leadership



There is unequal treatment based on gender at the club



The club does enough to promote the women's team



The women's team has an equal say in club decisions



Strongly disagree Slightly disagree Slightly agree Strongly agree

Note: Colours reversed for fourth statement due to it being a negative attribute

The results showed a lot of room for improvement. Less than a third (31%) of players across the ALW agreed that both teams at their clubs were well integrated.

A majority of players disagreed that their women's team has an equal say in club decisions (72%) and that their team is a priority for club leadership (62%). Nearly three in four (72%) agreed there is unequal treatment on the basis of gender at their club, including 34% who strongly agreed.

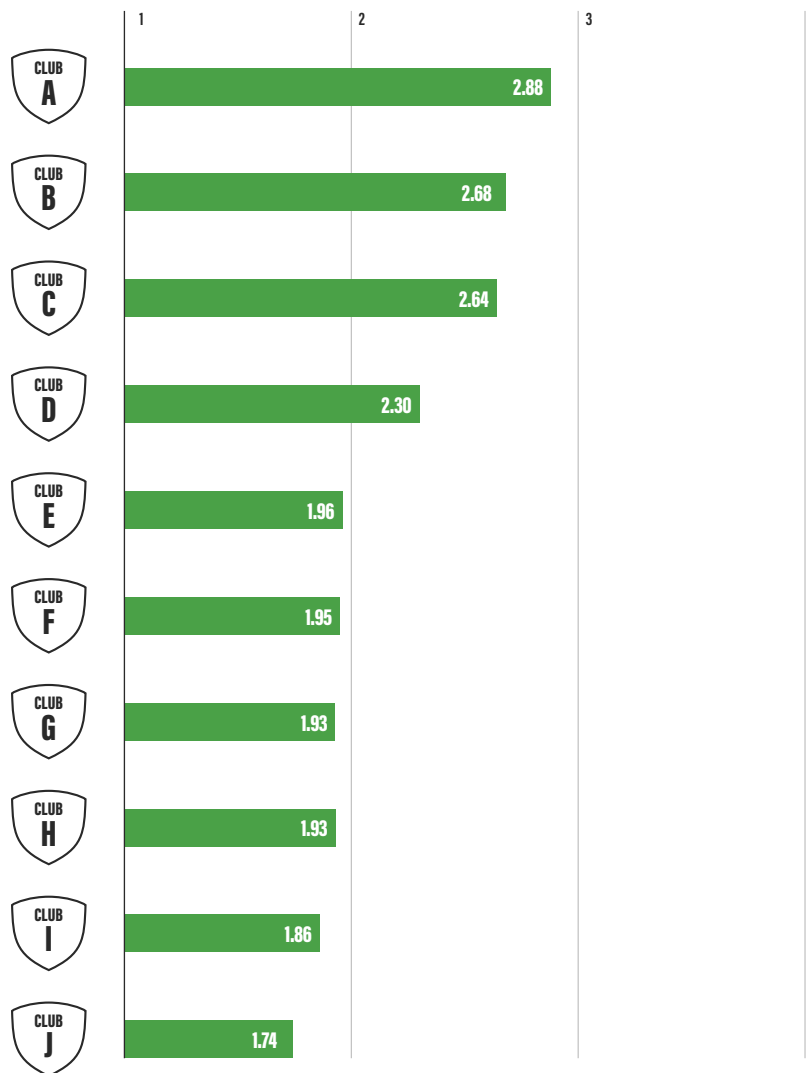
More encouragingly, two thirds of players (65%) agreed that the women's team is a valued part of the club. Just over half (52%) agreed their club does enough to promote the women's team.

Player feedback highlighted a wide range of examples. At some clubs, the A-League Men team were given priority access to gyms and other facilities or provided with resources that women were not, such as meals.

In many cases, the examples were more cultural or behavioural than financial. It was seen as a positive when senior club figures attended ALW training or matches. Some women players felt men's team players or staff did not respect their right to equal use of common areas.

Of course, results differed by club. To compare and track clubs, the PFA devised a 'Club Integration Index', which is simply one number, on a scale of one to four, which captures the combined responses to the six statements. If a club scored exactly one on the Index, all its players strongly disagreed with all statements (besides strongly agreeing with the fourth statement about unequal treatment). A perfect score of four would indicate strong agreement with all statements (besides strong disagreement with the unequal treatment statement).

The chart on this page shows the Index scores of the ten clubs which also have men's teams (i.e. excluding Canberra). The PFA has chosen to deidentify the clubs in this report while it works constructively with the clubs and APL to address the areas of required improvement. It reserves the right to change this stance in future.



PLAYER DEVELOPMENT



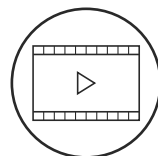
- ▶ Impact
- ▶ Career & Transition

IMPACT

Through the CBA, the players agree with APL for funds to be invested into supporting players off the pitch through the PFA Player Development Program. Aiming to support PFA members in relation to their wellbeing, career, and to prepare for their playing retirement, the Program continues to see unprecedented growth.



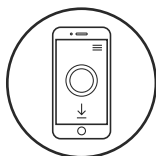
77
Education Grants



36
Highlights Packages



82
PFA Concussion Workshops Attendance



82
PFA Red Button & Match-Fixing Workshops Attendance



215
PFA Pre-Season Presentations Attendance



Satisfaction with the Player Development Program



■ Extremely Dissatisfied
 ■ Slightly Dissatisfied
 ■ Slightly Satisfied
 ■ Extremely Satisfied

Note: N/A excluded

CAREER & TRANSITION

The share of players studying while playing returned to a pre-pandemic level of 38%, down from the 54% and 55% of the past two seasons.

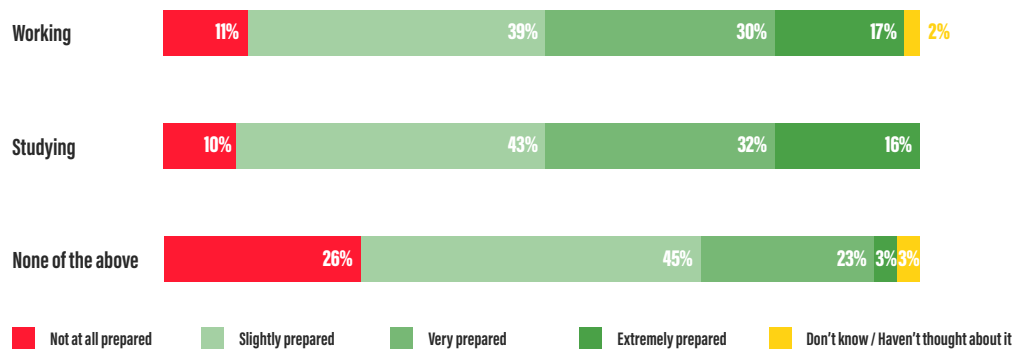
Working and studying alongside football were both associated with higher self-reported preparedness for life after football, compared to a baseline of players neither working nor studying.



The Employment Framework section of this report discusses the increasing difficulty for players to balance football with still-necessary supplementary work commitments. So, for the average player, work outside football does seem to have a positive impact on post-career readiness, while having a negative impact while playing.

The same does not apply for studying. Study has the same positive impact on post-career readiness but is not associated with significantly different life-balance satisfaction compared to players not engaged in any study.

In general, how prepared do you feel for life after football?



How satisfied are you with your current balance between football/work/study/life?



COURAGE
WORLD CLASS
INTELLIGENCE
TRUST
RESPECT



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